the face is familiar

...OR, THE CASE IS FAMILIAR!

By PEARL GONZALEZ

As if you didn't know by now, there's an American named Kaplan who is in jail here serving a term for having killed another American, Vidal, who has never been proven to be dead.

What is Joel David Kaplan like?

Physically, he stands about five feet eight, has large brooding brown eyes, is about 40 and is balding rapidly.

Mentally, he is quite a giant. He was born in New York but practically grew up in New Mexico where he graduated from Roswell Military Institute, a high school, at the age of 16.

He reads The New York Times daily and Harpers and Atlantic magazines monthly. He speaks English, Spanish and "gets along rather well in French." He, therefore, is as up-to-date on world happenings as the daily newspapers. He has his opinions, too.

"Do you think any Cubans were mixed up in the death of Kennedy?"

"There might be a few independent Cubans involved but I don't think Cuba itself is involved. The Warren Report is obviously full of holes. It's a coverup so that no one will investigate deeper things."

"What are your politics?"

"I'm not a member of any political party but I'm slightly left in Latin America. That's why I got into gunrunning. It's dictators like the Somozas of Nicaragua who should be gotten rid of. In the United States, there are two parties but they're practically the same, both representing business committees. However, the Democrats are more flexible. For example, Kennedy was in favor of social reforms."

"Your attorney, Victor Velázquez, remarked that you should be a writer. Have you ever tried writing?"

"Yes, short things. However, when you write you must keep in mind what magazine you are writing for since they all have their own viewpoints."

"What did you do when you graduated from military school?"

"The war was on and I wasn't thrilled about the idea of going into the infantry so I joined the Naval Air Force. I spent most of the war in the Miami Naval Air Station in Opa-Locka, Fla. I was in that for the last year of the war and the first year of the peace."

"I've heard that you were in Naval Intelligence during the war. Is that true?"

"How could it be? I was only 17 at the time and intelligence didn't take anyone that young."

"What did you do after the first year of the peace?"

"I went into my father's business. He has a branch in Veracruz. It was just there and he needed me."

"How did you meet Vidal?"

"Our fathers were in business together. I think I first met him in New York in 1950. We weren't close friends but he seemed a pleasant enough fellow. Friendly."

"Did it occur to you that there might be some unfriendly reason for his wanting you to meet him here in 1961? Like his seeming to have disappeared, leaving you in a situation like this?"

"Yes, it's occurred to me quite often. I've had a lot of time to think about it. Maybe it was because he wanted money which I refused to give him. We were in business together in molasses you know."

"What's life here like?"

"I have a rather large room. They've cleaned out the rats. I live alone. I have my radio and my books. My wife brings me food every day. It isn't too bad."

"You're speaking of the Mexican girl you married as your wife, aren't you? When did you divorce the girl you married in New York a long time ago?"

"By a twist of circumstances, I had to marry the Mexican girl before the New York divorce. However, my attorneys in New York are taking care of it now. I intend to stay married to the Mexican girl. She's been very kind and loyal to me. When I first came to this prison (Lecumberri) every human privilege was denied me because I wouldn't pay for it. I married this girl because it was the only way I could have had visitors."

"Somehow, I don't see you as a military student. Did you really like it?"

"Well, I wouldn't exactly call myself rebellious, but I did cope with it. My father was a typical Russian Jew who ruled his family with an iron hand. Military school was his idea. Although my father and I got along not too badly in business, we had tremendous disagreements on other things."

"It would appear then that you had to fight for your individuality."

"That's always been true. The conformist fulfills a certain function. But he never goes beyond that. The individual is the one who makes progress. This doesn't necessarily mean that he's a happy individual, though."